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SÉBASTIEN CASTELLION AND RELIGIOUS TOLERATION.

ONE of the last Frenchmen whom I met before starting from Paris in April was M. Ferdinand Buisson, Director of Primary Education in the Ministry of Public Instruction, a leading authority in France on all pedagogical questions and one of the founders of the public school system of that country. On leaving him, he presented me with two magnificent volumes* devoted to the humble life and lofty labors of Sébastien Castellion, the Franco-Swiss teacher, author, theologian, and reformer, one of the earliest and most fearless apostles of religious toleration; and he suggested that I give wider publicity to this work in the English-speaking world. This biography deserves indeed to be better known among us, both on account of the author and the subject; and hence the writing of this article, which is based mainly on a review of the work from the pen of Prof. Alfred Rambaud.†

In his Preface, M. Buisson says: "Ten times interrupted and each time for a long interval, the book was never entirely abandoned even when the author might have despaired of ever finishing it." Begun in 1865, the labor was not completed till last year. It was a heavy task. The study of the materials was in itself Herculean. Countless printed or manuscript documents which had to be examined were scattered through the libraries of cities, universities, and

* *Sébastien Castellion, sa vie et son œuvre (1515-1563), étude sur les origines du protestantisme libéral français*, 2 vols. in-8°. Paris, Hachette. A copy of this work will be found in the library of Cornell University.

† See *Revue Bleue*, Tome 50, No. 6.

churches in France, Germany, Holland, and Switzerland. The bibliography of Castellion's writings, giving their various editions from the middle of the sixteenth century down to our own day, and embracing their translations into all the tongues of Europe—this alone was an undertaking of no ordinary kind. In a word, as one of the reviewers truly says, "this book is a veritable encyclopædia of the Renaissance and the Reformation."

Who was Sébastien Castellion? M. Rambaud answers the question as follows on the authority of M. Buisson. We are told that he was one of the most learned humanists and professors of the sixteenth century. A Latin school book which he compiled had much the same success in Europe in those days as Webster's spelling-book has had in our own country during the present century. I refer to his "*Dialogi Sacri*" of which M. Buisson has unearthed not less than one hundred and thirty editions issued between 1543 and 1791, and to be found in all the important cities of Switzerland, Germany, and the Low Countries, in London, Edinburgh, and Dublin, and even in Spain and Hungary. His Greek and Latin poems, his translations from the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, delighted the humanists of his time, while his translations of the Bible into Latin and French were events in the religious and literary worlds of that age. But the originality of Castellion lies in the private evolution of his religious mind, the affirmation of two or three great truths which he was among the first to proclaim, which he was among the most determined in supporting, and which mark him as one of the founders of several great Protestant sects and one of the earliest precursors of liberty of conscience.

Sébastien Castellion was born in 1515 in France near the Swiss frontier and studied at Lyons, then a famous seat of learning. When the Reformation burst upon the world, the little group of Lyonesse humanists, who counted Castellion among their number, was immediately split in twain. One division submitted to Rome, but the second, to which Castellion belonged, revolted. What finally decided him to break with the old church was the terrible spectacle of the execution of heretics. In 1536, Jean Cormon, a peasant of Bresse near the birthplace of Castellion, perished in the flames

simply because he had colported the Bible. In 1538 Castellion learned that a book-seller, Jean de Lagarde, and a Toulouse student, had met a similar fate in Paris. Martin Gorain was drowned at Grenoble in 1536, while the following year witnessed the burning of several heretics in various parts of France. Finally, in Lyons itself, the very *alma mater* of Castellion, Cardinal de Tournon gave to the flames four poor souls in January, 1540. These cruel butcheries pierced the very heart of Castellion.

Up to this time the exact doctrine and meaning of the Reformation was not absolutely clear to Castellion nor to many others who were wavering like himself. But when, in March 1536, Calvin's "Institution Chrétienne" appeared, the Reformation became more definite in Castellion's mind. From that moment he may be said to have become a Calvinist. This book and the *autos-da-fé* decided his vocation. In the spring of 1540 he went to Strassburg and lived under the same roof with Calvin, paying his share of the expenses, it should be noted, and becoming one of Calvin's most devoted disciples. Calvin was then thirty-one years old and Castellion was his senior by three or four years. When the former was recalled to Geneva, the latter followed him and became, in 1541, the head of a college there. Then it was that Castellion published his "Dialogi Sacri" and began his translations of the Bible. He now desired to become a minister, but as he would not accept Calvin's interpretation of certain portions of the Bible, the latter refused to allow him to take holy orders. Castellion thereupon decided to break with Calvin and quitted Geneva. Thus began the struggle which is still going on between Liberalism and Orthodoxy.

When Castellion left Geneva he of course had to give up his college professorship which furnished himself and family with bread, and was consequently plunged into the deepest poverty. He applied for a position in the college of Lausanne. But there was no vacancy there. He moved on to Bâle where he became proof reader in a printing-office belonging to one Oporin. His salary was so small, however, that, in order to have any fire at home, he had to fish out the wood found floating down the Rhine. But this terrible struggle for material existence was not the only burden he had to

bear. Calvin's hatred followed him everywhere. The public letters of the Genevese autocrat were widely circulated and all of them contained extravagant denunciations of Castellion. Finally, in 1552, this martyr to freethought found a momentary respite and became Reader in Greek at the Bâle university. Though he still lived in the most frugal manner, the wolf was no longer at the door. But this bitter experience did not weaken Castellion's moral courage. At that very moment he was girding his loins for a still fiercer struggle with his enemies in the church.

When Calvin put to death Servetus, only two men in all Helvetia dared lift up their voices in public protest. One of these was, of course, Castellion, who, notwithstanding the fact that Calvin had many and powerful friends in Bâle and that he endangered his newly-acquired position at the University, came out in a bold manifesto. It was indeed published under an assumed name—Martin Bellie—but everybody knew who the real author was. In order that his pamphlet should obtain the widest possible publicity, he issued it in both Latin and French, dedicating the first to the Count of Hesse and the second to the Duke of Würtemberg, whose dominions had accepted the Lutheran Reformation. This act brought down upon him a new storm.

When Castellion gave to the world his "De Hæreticis" and his "Traité des Hérétiques"—the pamphlets just referred to—his enemies had not yet forgotten the two prefaces which he had placed at the head of his Latin and French editions of the Bible. These were the first manifestos published in favor of liberty of conscience; the "De Hæreticis" and its French version were the second. This latter work went through many editions at Magdeburg, Strassburg, and other European cities. It was also known as the "Farrago Bellii," because of the mass of texts which it contained, borrowed from the early fathers, the chief reformers, from Luther himself, and all of which advocated toleration. Even Calvin was represented by one text, rather equivocal however, in which he preaches the employment of "science and not force," and in which he speaks of "the celestial melody of the Holy Ghost." Bèze, the *alter ego* of Calvin, answered Castellion in a pamphlet, which declares that it is

the right and duty of the Church to put heretics to death. This was the old doctrine of Rome and the Spanish Inquisition. All this made Castellion's pseudonym so famous that Bellianism and Bellianist became common terms in the religious discussions of that age, and continued to be such for years afterwards.

Apropos of this pamphlet, Professor Rambaud says : "It should be noted that Castellion is not a sceptic like Rabelais and Montesquieu, not a politician like the author of the 'Satire Ménippée.' He is as firm in the faith as the early martyrs of the Reformation, as sturdy a theologian as Calvin or Theodore de Bèze. His taking up the principle of toleration was not brought about by feelings of French patriotism, of political wisdom, of humanity, nor even of pure Christian charity. No, it was from a scrupulous study of texts that he was led to accept this doctrine. It was his conviction that toleration was the veritable spirit of Christianity and the Reformation. It was from theology itself that he drew his arguments against the excesses of theologians."

In the "De Hæreticis" no mention is made of the destruction of Servetus, which really called forth the pamphlet; or at least it contains only very vague allusions to this crime. But this act of momentary abstention was not to be taken to mean that Castellion feared to attack his powerful foe in this vulnerable spot. Scarcely was the ink dry on the other pamphlet when he finished the manuscript of "Contra Libellum Calvini," in which he turns his attention to Calvin himself and his recent reprehensible act. He says : "To-day John Calvin enjoys great power, and I would wish it still greater if he were only animated by more kindly sentiments. But his latest action is a bloody murder, and his latest publication is a direct menace to the lives of many pious men." Then the brave author gives the details of the execution and refutes point by point Calvin's theories. But neither this work, nor the "Annotation sur l'Épître aux Romains," which was written in the same spirit, could be printed. Castellion's former publications had created too great a sensation and had worked too much harm to the Calvinists, to permit him to continue to print *ad libitum*. So the censor was called upon to act, and even in the free city of Bâle he was strong enough

to suppress Castellion. The tractate circulated only in manuscript copies.

Castellion was always on the side of humanity and gentleness, as opposed to the cruelty and barbarism of his age. Torture, as a means of forcing confessions from accused persons, was then countenanced by all the jurists of Europe, and religious innovators might be pardoned, perhaps, if they accepted the practice. But at least one voice was raised against it, and it spoke exactly as did Montesquieu and Voltaire two centuries later. Here, as everywhere, Castellion was to be found opposed to Calvin. Somebody objected: "But many guilty persons will escape if torture is abolished." Castellion answered: "No law calls for the punishment of unknown crimes; be contented to punish those that are known."

Calvin, as everybody knows, believed in predestination. Castellion took up the other view. Thereupon the former attacked him again and directed Bèze to do the same. "How long will you suffer to dwell in your midst this shameful fellow, this clot of mud, this pest?" wrote Bèze to the magistrates of Bâle. Castellion, in his turn, called upon the magistrates of Geneva, but mark the difference of tone and purpose. He said to these recreants, while he urged them to become men and put an end to this intolerance: "For the love of Christ, I beg of you, I conjure you, to leave me in peace and to cease persecuting me. Grant me the freedom of my faith and the freedom to profess it, just as I do in respect to you and yours. If there are those who separate themselves from you, do not declare forthwith that they turn their backs on the truth, do not fall upon them as though they were blasphemers. Taking religion as a whole, I am not in disaccord with you. It is the same Christian religion which I, like you, delight to serve. On certain points of interpretation only, I, with several others, hold different views from you. Let the most learned, then, be also the most charitable!" These words sound as if they were written to-day, instead of over three centuries ago. One might think them to have fallen from the pen of the Rev. Mr. Briggs! This shows how far in advance of his time was Sébastien Castellion, or rather how far behind the times is modern Protestantism.

Castellion was not simply a musty theologian ; he looked upon religion with the mind of a practical statesman. At the time when the civil and religious wars were raging in France, he wrote, in 1562: "Keep up the two forms of religion—the Roman Catholic and the Protestant ; let both be free, so that everybody may choose, without constraint, the one he prefers." This was the view Henry IV. took of the matter in 1598, when he promulgated the edict of Nantes ; and this is the view liberal France has been striving to maintain ever since, even down to the present year of grace.

"With Castellion on the one hand," says Professor Rambaud, "and Calvin, backed by Theodore de Bèze, on the other, the conditions of this theological duel were not equal. The latter were supported by the State, by the public authorities, by the courts, and by the public executioner. They had with them the presses ; and, more than this, by the aid of the Geneva censor and the information which was furnished them through the censorships in the other Helvetic states, they could prevent the publication and circulation of the replies and attacks of their opponents. Several of Castellion's most powerful tractates never saw the light in book-form. He was not even secure from bodily harm even at Bâle. In 1563 an attempt was made to get him implicated in a trial brought against a family of Anabaptists which ended with the disinterring and the burning of the bones of one David Joris. At Bâle at least, the *autos-da-fé* were made only with dead bodies."

Insulted by men who were once his friends and teachers, railed at by the multitude, continually in danger of finding himself and family deprived of their daily bread, his very life threatened, Castellion, worn out by bodily deprivation, mental strain, and moral disappointment, died in 1563 at the early age of 48, just as he was on the point of losing his university chair and of being banished from Helvetia. His enemies eagerly took upon themselves to preach his funeral oration. Theodore de Bèze recalled how he had prophesied to him that "the Saviour would soon punish him for his blasphemies." Bullinger wrote : "Castellion is dead. Good !" Gwalter remarked that in order not to have to plead his cause before the Bâle Senate, Castellion had "appealed to Rhadamanthus."

For a century and a half after his death Castellion's writings were known to the learned and the theologians. His books and manuscripts were read by the pious. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries two of the greatest Protestant sects—the Socianists and the Arminians—claimed him as one of theirs. The liberal wing of French Protestantism is a son of his doctrine, while here in the United States many of our churches may look upon him as one of their founders. In M. Buisson's final chapter entitled "Posthumous Influences," attention is called to the close union between Castellion's doctrines and those held by Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson. Of him then it may be truly said that though the body be dead the spirit still liveth.

M. Buisson's first volume contains a portrait of Castellion drawn by the distinguished French artist Jean Paul Laurens after the portrait engraved for Castellion's Latin Bible, edition of 1729. This is the only portrait of him known to exist. "To this cold and dry engraving," says M. Buisson, "M. Jean Paul Laurens has been able to give life without detracting from its austerity." We are further told that the artist undertook the work out of "sympathy, awakened after reading several chapters, for the humble hero of this book."

THEODORE STANTON.